

Guiding Principles of ATC-20 Rapid Assessments (“Tagging”)

1. **Objectives of tagging:** The objective of tagging is to get people back into safe homes and businesses as quickly as possible, and to keep people out of unsafe structures. By doing this, tagging aids disaster recovery and reduces demand on relief agencies.
2. **Tagging is about safety:** Tagging should focus on *significant changes* in the *safety* of buildings as a result of the disaster. Tagging should not consider issues of code compliance. The tagging process is not a damage survey, but an assessment of whether the building is safe for entry or occupancy.
3. **Using Green tags (Inspected):** Buildings can be damaged and still be safe. Buildings whose safety has not been *significantly* changed by the disaster should be green tagged, even if conspicuously damaged, deficient with respect to the code, or known to be seismically vulnerable.
4. **Using Red tags (Unsafe):** Only conditions that are the result of the disaster and that pose an imminent threat to life safety for entry or occupancy in all or most of the structure under expected loads should be red tagged.
5. **Using Yellow tags (Restricted Use):** Restricted Use tagging should be used when there is some risk from damage in all or part of the building that does not warrant red tagging. Entry, occupancy, and lawful use are restricted in accordance with the area, occupancy duration, or other restrictions as written on the placard. If resources are available, restricted areas should be cordoned off and marked with “Area Unsafe” placards (a Red tag with “Area” handwritten before “Unsafe”). When the extent of significant damage is uncertain or cannot be ascertained within the time and resources available to a Rapid Inspection, the building should be yellow tagged, with additional inspection requirements and any restrictions on use or occupancy clearly noted on the placard.
6. **Be thorough:** Resources may ultimately not be available to provide Detailed Evaluations to follow up on Rapid Evaluations. Do Rapid Evaluations quickly but carefully. Tags and evaluation forms should be completely filled out, including clear, concise written comments where appropriate to guide occupants, building officials, and possible subsequent inspectors. Enter and evaluate the building interior if it is safe and possible to do so.
7. **Be helpful:** Explain the posting and its significance to building occupants who are present. Be sympathetic to their concerns and strive to be reassuring.
8. **Be careful:** Take care of yourself. Always work with a partner, utilize proper safety equipment and procedures, and be aware of hazards. The first rule of post-earthquake safety is: Do not enter or walk near a structure that is leaning or unstable.
9. **Dealing with HAZMATs:** Do not enter buildings if discharge of hazardous materials is found or strongly suspected – cordon off the area and notify appropriate authorities (i.e. local fire department). Look for HAZMAT signage, spills, or leaking containers/piping. Foul odors and hissing sounds of leaking contents are strong warnings.
10. **Understand the process:** Recognize that you are one part of a large, distributed organization involved in responding to the disaster. Know and follow the chain of command, but don’t hesitate to offer help/suggestions. Be proactive and flexible within your span of control/responsibility. Improvise as necessary to meet the objectives: getting people back into safe structures and keeping them out of unsafe ones.